

MARSHALL MCLUHAN MAKES A MOVIE

Hearing rumours that Marshall McLuhan had become involved in filmmaking, we sent *Take One* Associate Editor Joe Medjuck (a student of Professor McLuhan's) off to interview him.



Marshall McLuhan: My film projects are slightly embryonic. I am making one on the city. That's the only film I'm actually making. I certainly plan to do some, but first I'm going to get rid of a lot of books. Books that I've already half written or three-quarters written. I've got at least half a dozen to finish off. Then I'm through with books.

Joe Medjuck: Forever?

M.M.: At least I hope so. But anyway, I'm not going to specify the program I have in mind. It's a bit early.

J.M.: When you finish with the books and go into films will you work at acquiring technical expertise?

M.M.: One acquires as much expertise as one has to acquire, that's all. It's the same as writing, or anything, you acquire as much education as is necessary to get the job done.

The city film is being done by people who make ads for tv all the time. I don't think myself that the tv ad is very well adapted to tv. It's mostly done by film people on film terms and for film audiences. No, I think television advertising is in very poor shape. Exceedingly poor shape. And on the other hand I don't feel any great crusading need to improve advertising. Not at all. I just sit back and enjoy the stuff in all its squalor.

The same thing happens to the city as happens to tv and advertising. You put an outer ring of suburb around an old city and this automatically destroys the inner city, that's all. And if you put a new medium around an old one it automatically destroys the old one. In the act of using the old one it destroys it. But in destroying it, it turns it into an art form. Movies are now art form because they've been completely destroyed by tv. Now this is simple fact. TV destroyed radio and radio's now an art form. Glenn Gould makes radio programs. Real arty. Now I just came from the national religious broadcasting convention. They've been using radio for simple religious culture for the last twenty years — just exactly the period of tv. TV turned radio over to them as a serious cultural form. TV will itself be destroyed — wiped out — by some laser-type or some other type, or satellite-type of broadcasting. It will in turn become a respectable art form. The planet has been destroyed by the satellite environment and has become an art form. As art, we now recognize it as polluted — it's a mess. We've got to restore this old masterpiece. You see the planet has now been destroyed by the satellite world and has become an old art form. We recognize it as an old masterpiece, but it's been horribly defaced by dealers, restorers, developers, etc., etc. But the earth is capable of being renewed and restored to its original perfection as in the Garden of Eden, so we now see every part of the earth as — it's as if it had gone through the hands of art restorers, you know, an old masterpiece that's been restored by twentieth century vulgarity. And so we're going to improve it to no end. I don't see

how you can go any further than that really, having destroyed nature itself by putting satellites around and having now begun to approach the planet as a work of art. That's about as total a project as you can imagine. But that is our immediate program. We're going to reprogram and depollute every part of the planet. And it wasn't begun yesterday. Pollution is not new. Don't forget the Sahara Desert and a few little things like that. The planet's been polluted many times before. Totally. And so we're going to put it in good working shape.

J.M.: I know you don't like to pigeon-hole things, but what is your official title on the city film?

M.M.: Oh, Jane Jacobs and I simply scripted it. That's all. And then we make various suggestions to the makers about footage here and there and E-fects above all — the effects we want. We'll leave the footage very largely to him once he knows the kind of E-fect we want. He's got masses of footage, doesn't have to do much shooting for us.

J.M.: Could you say something about the "optical circus" which I think you're planning to do on film too?

M.M.: That's purely an experimental kind of thing. Again we're thinking of E-fect. We want to find out what will happen if we deprive a picture of all but visual effects, take out all the known visual component. It's like a chemical experiment of isolating a particular element like oxygen from all other elements. You know what happens when you isolate oxygen, you have a very inflammable thing. We're hoping this optical circus will have a startling effect on the other senses, that people on trips — addicts of various types who are playing around with their sensory lives, in the direct contact with this extreme type of sensory thing — will be dislocated out of habits and out of, you know, ways of involvement, that it may disengage them very suddenly, untie them, unhook them, very suddenly, just yank them out. Carpenter tells me — Ted Carpenter — he said that by simply recording a group of natives and playing back their own voices and sounds to them, you can put them through about a thousand years of Western culture in five minutes. It has the effect of a hundred years of literacy, just playing back their own sounds to them, on another medium. Wham. And he said it's somewhat the same with film, if they go out and make their own films and then see them.

We're not sure what's going to happen. It's an experiment, we don't know what'll happen. We don't know whether we can really isolate it [the visual sense] either.

We're temporarily doing a regular scripted job for film but the trouble with film is that it's kinetic. There's a big kinetic component which is non-visual. And so we're experimenting that's all. If we knew what was going to happen, it wouldn't be an experiment.

Again we're still working on it, but we're certainly eliminating colour, which is not a visual component. And we're eliminating perspective, we're eliminating the kinds of space that depend on any of the other senses except sight. And that's not easy. Sight is all mixed in with the other senses. It's very difficult to pull it off. It's an abstract, has to be an extreme film. ■

